

## NCRC Preliminary Report on Dog Bite-Related Fatalities in 2010

---

### Overview

We are currently investigating thirty-three incidents that occurred during 2010 that may qualify as dog bite-related fatalities. A final tally is subject to change. \* In a number of cases, a person was found dead and dog activity was suspected but not conclusively determined, or a person died a significant amount of time after being injured. Inclusion or removal of such cases from the list of dog bite-related fatalities in 2010 will depend upon review of final autopsy results.

Our mission of preserving the human-canine bond obligates us to be as accurate about these emotionally charged events as we can. Therefore, we publish our initial findings for 2010 in this preliminary report, with a final report to be issued in the first week of 2012.

Our preliminary findings are that the overwhelming majority of dogs involved in these incidents were not family pets. Many were victims of abuse and neglect.

Detailed analysis of the circumstances surrounding the 2010 incidents must await further research. For example, eight cases are, or may become, the subject of ongoing criminal investigations. In at least five cases, the dog(s) involved have not been located and/or identified (see below for one such case).

We are in the process of contacting officials in each case in order to obtain the most accurate and comprehensive information available. We will re-interview sources that the media has reached, and locate others that they have not, among whom may be police investigators, animal control officers, coroners, veterinarians, health department officials, dog owners, and eye witnesses. We will seek incident reports, bite reports, human and animal autopsy reports, summaries of judicial proceedings, and crime scene data and photographs. While not all, or even any, of these sources and reports may be available with respect to each individual case, our experience has shown that official reports often do not agree with news accounts and/or contain important information that was either unavailable or not of interest to reporters.

## Accuracy takes time and work: a case study

This past August, in Macon, Georgia, news reports implicated dogs who could not possibly have been involved in the fatality.

A woman named Tracey Brazzell Payne had been fatally injured by a dog or dogs. News reports claimed that “pit bulls” residing on a property near where Ms. Payne’s body was found were the dogs responsible for her injuries. These accounts also reported that one of the dogs had injured a man the evening before.

The media published reports about these attacks on August 20<sup>th</sup> and August 21<sup>st</sup>, before investigators were able to assess the scene, examine evidence and interview witnesses.

NCRC has now conducted two interviews with the Macon Police Department Captain in charge of the investigation. The captain informed us that their investigation revealed: a) The victim was not found near the enclosure or on the property where the dogs resided, but across the dirt road in a vacant lot; b) there is no indication that the enclosure, the fencing of which was six to seven feet high, was breached either by the dogs or by Ms. Payne; c) there was no blood on any of the dogs or in the enclosure where the dogs resided; d) the man who had been injured the previous evening told police that the dogs in the secure enclosure were not the dogs that injured him; e) an altogether different dog was seen pacing back and forth on the site where Ms. Payne was found, but fled before officers could catch it.

The police have conclusively determined that the “pit bulls” identified and photographed by the media, were NOT the dogs that attacked Ms. Payne. The dog(s) that attacked her have never been located or identified. The media did not publish any follow-up stories summarizing the findings of the police investigation; anyone relying exclusively on news accounts to compile a report on dog bite related fatalities in 2010 will only find the initial erroneous stories printed in the first forty-eight hours following the discovery of Ms. Payne’s body.

The media had the story wrong. Anyone relying exclusively on media accounts to report on Ms. Payne’s death will also have it wrong.

## We are responsible for the dogs in our midst

Dogs should not be characterized apart from their relationships to human beings.

Dog bite-related fatalities are extremely rare. Each is a product of its own complex calculus. If there is anything that analysis of these isolated tragedies can teach us, it is that all dog owners have an unequivocal responsibility for the humane care (including proper diet, veterinary care, socialization and training), custody (including licensing and micro-chipping), and control of their dogs.

###

\* A dog bite-related fatality is one where a human being has died as a result of trauma, exsanguinations or avulsions attributable to dog bites. Preliminary reports of incidents in 2009 pointed to thirty-five dog bite-related fatalities. Further investigation revealed that four of the thirty-five (two deaths from infection, one from a fall, and one where the coroner could not determine whether the dog bites were pre- or post-mortem) did not meet the standard definition. (Our final report for 2009 can be viewed here: <http://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/2009-DBRF-Booklet-FINAL-11.pdf>.) Comparable adjustments may be necessary among the incidents we are investigating for 2010.